

UPSTATE UPDATE NUMBER 16

December 29, 2000

As you are making all of those resolutions for the new year, take a break and join us in reflecting on the achievements this year in promoting sensible growth and protecting special places in the Upstate. Here is our proposed list of the top 10:

1. Promising Signs of Regional Cooperation.

One of the Upstate's greatest challenges is the need for our local officials and citizens to think regionally. Like it or not, we are growing and developing as a region, and we urgently need a regional perspective on growth and land use issues. There were some promising signs that such a perspective is emerging in the Upstate. The Western Carolina Regional Sewer Authority reconvened the Upstate Roundtable, a group of sewer providers, business leaders, government officials and interested citizens from Greenville, Spartanburg, Anderson and Pickens Counties to discuss how the region will meet the demand for wastewater treatment over the next 20 years. *Upstate Forever* Associate Director Diane Eldridge serves as a member of this group.

Two successful regional conferences were held during the year: one on rail and the other on air quality. Obviously, these are regional challenges that must be addressed on that basis. *Upstate Forever* Executive Director Brad Wyche served on the transportation conformity committee for the air quality summit.

We should also mention the Governor's Summit on Growth that was held in Greenville from March 26-28. This conference attracted over 300 persons from all parts of South Carolina to discuss land use and growth issues. *Upstate Forever* was actively involved in planning the conference, and Brad Wyche was one of the speakers.

2. *Anderson County's Petition Zoning Program.*

Anderson County continued to make remarkable progress with its community-based petition zoning program. This program represents democracy at its best because it allows citizens to decide whether or not they want zoning. After a petition for zoning is submitted by at least 10 per cent of the voters in a precinct (this was recently increased to 15 per cent), the County Planning Commission hosts a series of public meetings during which a zoning map for the area is prepared. The map is then submitted to the voters in the precinct for approval. During the year, there were 13 referenda held in the county, and 11 were approved, most by overwhelming margins. As of today, there are over 20 more petitions circulating in the county. For more information, see Jeff Ricketson's article in our upcoming newsletter.

The Anderson County model is an excellent one for Spartanburg, Pickens, Laurens and Oconee Counties where there continues to be no zoning (except for the major cities) and for the remaining 40 per cent of Greenville County which lacks zoning. Why not let the people decide if they want zoning?

3. *Important Properties Preserved In The Upstate.*

Several important properties in the Upstate were acquired by federal and state agencies during the year and will be protected against development:

- The United States Forest Service acquired from Crescent Resources over 4,000 acres in Oconee County on the west side of Lake Jocassee. The property has become part of the Andrew Pickens Ranger District of the Sumter National Forest.
- The South Carolina Forestry Commission acquired approximately 1,800-acres in Pickens County adjacent to the Keowee-Toxaway State Park. Buzzard Roost and Cedar Creek Mountains as well as a bog known as Beaver Pond are

part of this tract. The Forestry Commission will probably use the property as a demonstration site for improved forest management practices.

- The spectacular 6,000-acre Blue Wall Preserve project near Hog Back Mountain in northeastern Greenville County was completed with the acquisition by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources of 1,650 acres from Champion International and Champion Realty.
- The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources also acquired a 571-acre tract known as “Shooting Tree Ridge” north of Highway 11.

4. Highway 295 Connector Project Abandoned.

Upstate Forever strongly opposed the construction of a proposed \$39 million, five-lane highway right through one of the most important natural and historic sites in Spartanburg County. Because of our involvement and the outcry of hundreds of citizens, the project was abandoned early this year.

5. Conservation Easement Conference A Success.

Upstate Forever hosted a major conference on conservation easements on November 14 in Greenville. This was the first in depth conference that has ever been held on conservation easements in the Upstate. Our co-sponsor was the Foothills Resource Conservation & Development Council, the association of the County Soil and Water Conservation Districts in Greenville, Spartanburg, Anderson, Pickens and Oconee Counties.

When we started planning the conference, our goal was to have about 100 people. Nearly 300 attended! And the press coverage was terrific!

We believe the conference has improved public understanding of the conservation easement as an important method of protecting the significant lands and resources in the Upstate.

6. *Sloan Property and Fairview Farms Preserved.*

Shortly after the conference, *Upstate Forever* received its first conservation easement. It was granted by Helen Sloan and her five children on approximately 200 acres of land in southern Greenville County. The property, which Mrs. Sloan and her husband, the late John L. Sloan, acquired in the early 1960s, includes Huff Creek, a 25-acre lake, over 150 acres of woodlands, and rich wildlife habitat.

Another exciting development was the acquisition of Fairview Farms, a beautiful 1,200-acre tract in northern Spartanburg County along the Pacolet River. The property contains an old growth self-replicating forest which is visited regularly by college science classes. There are several rare plant species on the property, and significant stands of hardwoods are located along the river.

The new owner of Fairview Farms has prepared a conservation development plan that allows only nine houses to be built on the entire property. The plan will be enforced through a conservation easement to be granted to *Upstate Forever*. We expect to receive the easement some time next summer.

7. *Lake Conestee Acquired.*

Lake Conestee may be coming back to life. After decades of abuse, neglect and pollution, the 145-acre lake, located on the Reedy River just a few miles downstream from Greenville, was acquired this year by the Conestee Foundation, a non-profit organization that wants to clean up the lake and restore the surrounding community. Plans are being drawn up to improve water quality, enhance wildlife habitat, and establish a greenway along the Reedy to connect the lake to downtown Greenville.

The Conestee project would never have happened without the visionary leadership and hard work of *Upstate Forever* Board member Dave Hargett. Several years ago, when Dave first mentioned his idea of buying and restoring the lake, only a few people shared his enthusiasm. But Dave persevered and has now garnered widespread support for the project.

8. *Greenville County Cluster and Open Space Ordinance.*

This important ordinance, originally approved in January, gives developers relief from the minimum lot size requirements contained in Greenville County's zoning ordinance in exchange for setting aside a portion of the property as open space. As a direct result of *Upstate Forever's* hard work, this portion was increased to a minimum of 30 per cent in the R-20 and RS zoning districts and to 50 per cent in the rural zoning district.

9. *Reedy River and Lawson's Fork Festivals.*

Two Upstate rivers were the sites of public festivals this year.

The first ever Reedy River Folk Festival was held in May at the Brashier campus of Greenville Technical College. The festival was planned by the Friends of Reedy River to raise awareness of the importance and potential of the river. Featuring Carla Bonoff and other top folk musicians, the festival offered food, fun and activities for adults and children alike.

Lawson's Fork in Spartanburg County was the site of a festival in April that featured music, art and nature activities. The event was organized by the Hub City Writers' Project to highlight the opportunities for recreation on the river, especially a 10-mile paddling trail. Released in conjunction with the festival was a book, "The Lawson's Fork – Headwaters to Confluence," and a video "Lawson's Fork – A Hub City Video Documentary," both of which describe the river's beauty and unique qualities. Congratulations to *Upstate Forever* Board member John Lane who played a key role in planning the festival, editing the book and producing the video!

10. *Upstate Forever Membership Exceeds 900!*

Upstate Forever received its tax exempt authorization in late 1998 and a few days later had its first member. As this year comes to a close, our membership roster now includes over 900 individuals, families and companies throughout the Upstate. We are deeply humbled and honored to

have received such strong support in such a short period of time. We look forward to working with all of our members for many years to come in promoting sensible growth and protecting special places in the Upstate!

Best wishes for a healthy and happy New Year!!